

Message Text

SECRET

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43

ACTION ARA-20

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R 202346Z AUG 73

FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 951

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

USCINCSO

S E C R E T CARACAS 7216

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:PBOR VE CO

SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN-COLOMBIAN BORDER DISPUTE

1. I ASKED CALVANI IF PRIVATELY HE COULD GIVE ME AN ESTIMATE OF WHERE VENEZUELA AND COLOMBIA STAND IN RESPECT OF THEIR BOUNDARY NEGOTIATIONS, HAVING IN MIND THAT THE COLOMBIAN FONMIN HAD TODAY POSTPONED HIS DEPARTURE FOR BOGOTA BY TWELVE HOURS.

2. CALVANI SAID THAT THE CONVERSATIONS HAD BEEN FRIENDLY BUT TOUGH. A SOLUTION WAS NOT RPT NOT YET IN SIGHT. HE SAID THERE WERE THREE FACTORS TO BE WORKED OUT AND EACH SEEMED TO BE EQUALLY DIFFICULT. THE FIRST PROBLEM WAS DELIMITATION OF THE DISPUTED TRIANGLE IN THE GULF OF VENEZUELA WHOSE SHORE BASE LINE ACTUALLY IS ONLY 35 KMS LONG. HOWEVER, DEPENDING ON WHETHER ONE TOOK THE VENEZUELAN POSITION OF A "CONVEX" DELIMITATION OR THE COLOMBIAN POSITION OF A "CONCAVE" DELIMITATION, THERE WERE VAST DIFFERENCES IN PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES BECAUSE IF ONE ACCEPTED THE COLOMBIAN THESIS AND ADOPTED THE COLOMBIAN INSISTENCE ON EQUAL DIVISION OF THE DISPUTED TERRITORY IT WOULD GIVE THE COLOMBIANS A VASTLY INCREASED AMOUNT OF CONTINENTAL SHELF. WITH MY LIMITED SOTRE OF FOREIGN SERVICE GEOMETRY I DID NOT GET INTO THE POSITION OF DEBATING CONVEXITY OR CONCAVITY

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AND I DID NOT THINK THAT CALVANI WANTED TO ENTER INTO THIS LINE

OF INQUIRY ANY MORE THAN I.

3. THE SECOND PROBLEM WAS THE HISTORICAL FEELING OF VENEZUELANES THAT THEY HAD ALWAYS BEEN "DONE IN" BY THE COLOMBIANS; AND HERE CALVANI RATTLED OFF A SERIES OF HISTORIC AWARDS AND ARBITRATIONS WHICH IN VENEZUELAN EYES AT LEAST HAD CONVINCED THE POPULACE HERE THAT THEY HAD BEEN ON THE SHORT END OF THE STICK ANY TIME THEY GOT INTO TERRITORIAL DISPUTE WITH COLOMBIA. I SAID IT SEEMED TO ME AS IF THE VENEZUELANES HAD ALMOST A PAVLOVIAN REACTION IN DEALING WITH COLOMBIANS, BUT WHEN I INQUIRED WHAT KIND OF REACTION THE COLOMBIANS HAD IN DEALING WITH THE VENEZUELANES, CALVANI REPLIED "THEY ARE EMOTIONAL TOO." HE ADDED, "THE COLOMBIANS HAVE A COMPLEX ON OIL. THEY DO NOT FORGET THAT THE AREA OF ECUADOR WHICH IS NOW PRODUCING PETROLEUM USED TO BELONG TO COLOMBIA AND THEY HAVE THEREFORE AN AGGRAVATED SENSE OF THE SUPPOSED MINERAL WEALTH OF THIS DISPUTED TRIANGLE IN THE GULF OF VENEZUELA."

4. THE THIRD POINT WAS AN OBVIOUS COROLLARY ON OIL, AND ON THIS ONE CALVANI ADMITTED THAT HIS INTEREST IN PETROLEUM WAS EQUAL TO THAT OF COLOMBIANS. HE SHOWED ME A PHOTOGRAPHIC MAP OF THE GULF OF VENEZUELA TAKEN BY A U.S. SATELLITE AND SAID DRAMATICALLY, "THIS IS THE HEART OF OUR COUNTRY."

5. I SAID I HAD HAD THE IMPRESSION IN TALKING WITH VAZQUEZ CARRIZOSA WHEN WE WERE IN MARACAIBO LAST MONTH THAT PERHAPS NO AGREEMENT COULD BE REACHED BEFORE THE ELECTIONS BOTH HERE AND THERE. TO MY SURPRISE, HOWEVER, CALVANI RESPONDED THAT HE THOUGHT IT NOT BEYOND THE REALM OF POSSIBILITY THAT AN AGREEMENT COULD BE REACHED BEFORE THE VENEZUELAN ELECTIONS; AND HE THOUGHT HE MIGHT GO TO BOGOTA NEXT MONTH.
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